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Soviet Union, Sofia Blast Indictments

CIA Campaign Charged by Tass

United Press International

The Soviet Union denounced the indictment of a Bulgarian airline official yesterday in the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II as "planned and . . . masterminded by the U.S. CIA," while Bulgaria called it the result of "a political conspiracy against Bulgaria and socialism."

The official Soviet news agency Tass said the indictment of Sergei Antonov, a former Bulgarian airline employe, was received by the Italian public "with indignation," and Radio Moscow called the charges "trumped up." Tass did not mention the simultaneous indictment of two other Bulgarian officials who are back in Sofia.

Tass said the charges against Antonov were "based on the false testimony of Turkish terrorist [Mehmet Ali] Agca, who fired at the pope of Rome. His revelations, as was already proved, have nothing to do with real facts."

"The decision of the judicial authorities to hold a trial of Antonov is viewed by the democratic press of Italy as yet another step in the noisy antisocialist campaign that was planned and is being masterminded by the U.S. CIA," Tass said.

Bulgaria condemned the indictment of the three Bulgarians as an antisocialist plot inspired by Washington and said the three were innocent.

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"It has become clear for every unbiased person that this is not a matter of judicial error, but of a political conspiracy against Bulgaria and socialism," the Bulgarian news agency BTA said.

Bulgaria blamed the indictment on "those circles of the United States and NATO whose interests lie in worsening East-West relations, in increasing international tensions and in stepping up the arms race."

["Objectivity and impartiality can hardly be expected (of) either the investigation or Italian justice," the Bulgarian news agency said, adding that "contempt was shown for obvious facts disproving any Bulgarian complicity (and) a gross breach of the investigation's secrecy was committed in violation of the principle that the accused is 'not guilty' until otherwise proven."]

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Foreign Intriguers

Unsubtle and Sloppy, Bulgaria's Spy Service Can Still Be Deadly

Linked to Plot to Kill Pope,
Agency Is Close to KGB;
Basic Rule: Intimidation

The Umbrella Assassination

By DAVID IGNATIUS

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

ROME—The Bulgarian spy service isn't subtle. When an Italian recruit named Luigi Scricciolo balked at obeying an espionage order in 1981, his Bulgarian officer threatened to throw him down a stairwell.

The Bulgarian case officer was named Ivan Dontchev; and even now, Mr. Scricciolo gets nervous talking about him. The Bulgarian, he says, was a crude man, "built like a wrestler," who would dismiss questions or criticisms abruptly by saying: "It's time for you to shut up."

The tough-talking Mr. Dontchev fits the profile gathered by Western intelligence of the Bulgarian state security agency, the Darzhavna Sigurnost. Even among East Bloc intelligence services, the Bulgarians are regarded as heavy-handed and sometimes clumsy operatives; as one American expert puts it, they are "a fourth-rate service," whose officers and agents often seem drawn from "a Balkan carnival."

Yet this motley crew has been linked to one of the crimes of the century—the plot to kill Pope John Paul II in May 1981. The evidence of Bulgarian involvement in the shooting, though largely circumstantial, is strong enough that Italian Judge Ilario Martella is expected soon to order the trial of Sergei Antonov, a Bulgarian who is under house arrest in Rome, and six others—two Bulgarians and four Turks—who allegedly conspired with the Turkish gunman Mehmet Ali Agca to kill the pope.

Web of Intrigue

Adding to the web of intrigue, Mr. Antonov admitted months ago to Italian Judge Ferdinando Imposimato that he had met "regularly" in Rome with Mr. Dontchev and the two other Bulgarian defendants in the case, Todor Ayyazov and Maj. Zeljko Vasilev. To Judge Imposimato who is investigating the broad Bulgarian espionage activities in Italy, these meetings suggest that all four men were Bulgarian intelligence officers.

Who ordered the papal shooting may never be known, even after a trial of Mr.

Antonov. The Bulgarians and the Soviets deny any involvement in the plot. Even the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, while it strongly suspects the Bulgarians, doubts that there will ever be conclusive proof.

The murkiest suspect in the case is the Darzhavna Sigurnost itself. Evidence gathered by The Wall Street Journal—including interviews with Bulgarian defectors, Italian judges and lawyers, and an alleged Italian agent of the Bulgarians—sketches a rough portrait of the Darzhavna Sigurnost and its links with the KGB, the Soviet Union's security and intelligence force. This evidence suggests that if the Bulgarians were involved in the plot to kill the Polish pope, the Soviets probably would have known about it.

The "DS," as it is known, is an aggressive spy service with unusually close ties to Moscow. DS officers have a sword-and-shield insignia that is similar to that of the KGB; they regularly receive Soviet military decorations; they sign KGB secrecy agreements pledging that they won't reveal classified Soviet information; and they maintain extensive contact with Soviet advisers in Bulgaria.

The Real Boss

"I refuse to use the word 'liaison' (with Moscow). There is only subordination," says Stefan Svirdlev, a former DS colonel who defected to the West in 1971. He maintains: "There can't be an operation that the Soviets don't know about."

The DS operates under the wing of the Bulgarian Interior Ministry, headquartered on 6th September Street in Sofia. Its nominal chief is Interior Minister Dimitur Stoyanov, who was recently promoted—despite the flap over the papal shooting—to candidate member of the Bulgarian Politburo. But the real boss is Bulgarian Communist Party chief Todor Zhivkov and, looking over his shoulder, the Soviet ambassador in Sofia.

The basic DS technique, at home and abroad, is intimidation. According to Col. Svirdlev, the DS employs about 40,000 security and police officers and maintains a network of informers so vast that one in every three Bulgarians regularly provides information. The DS even boasted of its pervasive surveillance in a Bulgarian television series about its exploits that was broadcast some years ago. The theme song was called "We Are at Every Kilometer"; for Bulgarians, the meaning of the song title was clear: Agents of the spy service are everywhere.

Deadly Umbrella

The long reach of Bulgarian intelligence was apparent in 1978, when an assassin in London used a poison-tipped umbrella to murder a troublesome Bulgarian defector, novelist Georgi Markov. A few weeks later, a poison pellet was found under the skin of another prominent Bulgarian defector in Paris, broadcaster Vladimir Kostov. Though

the assassins were never identified, U.S. officials are convinced they were Bulgarian intelligence officers.

"The men of the DS think they are untouchable. They are afraid only of the Soviets," says Mr. Kostov, who survived the poison-pellet attack and now works in Munich, West Germany, for Radio Free Europe.

The strong evidence that the DS tried—and failed—to kill Mr. Kostov illustrates an important point about the Bulgarians. They make mistakes. Indeed, to some Western specialists, DS operatives sometimes seem like a Balkan version of "The Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight"; in the case of Mr. Kostov, they violated the cardinal rule of assassination: Don't miss.

The Bulgarians in Rome were especially clumsy, using what intelligence experts describe as unsophisticated "tradecraft." The recruitment of Mr. Scricciolo began with a crude entrapment: He was invited to Bulgaria, given the equivalent of about \$5,000 for a left-wing political party he helped run, and then blackmailed into cooperating. (Mr. Scricciolo, during an interview in the apartment where he is held under house arrest by the Italian authorities, admits his dealings with Mr. Dontchev and other Bulgarians but denies that he was a Bulgarian spy.)

Spy Spoof

Some of the Bulgarian exploits read like a spy spoof. According to Italian investigators, Mr. Dontchev went on to recruit Mr. Scricciolo's wife, Paola Elia. They claim that he would arrange meetings with her by sticking little balls of modeling clay, known as *pongo*, to traffic lights near his home. The Italian investigators say that Ms. Elia's name for Mr. Dontchev was "Pallino," which means "Little Ball," and that she called another Bulgarian agent "Paperino," the Italian name for Donald Duck. (Ms. Elia

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